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PASS TO NEA/MAG

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SUBJECT: CCDH HEAD SAYS MOROCCO SEEKS ELECTION OBSERVERS AND HUMAN RIGHTS COOPERATION

REF: RABAT 905

Classified By: Ambassador Thomas Riley for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

SUMMARY

1. (SBU) Ahmed Herzenni, newly appointed President of the Royal Consultative Council on Human Rights (CCDH), told Ambassador Riley July 2nd that Morocco would welcome senior international observers in the upcoming parliamentary elections. He did not, however, want a flood of NGOs participating. He also asked whether the USG was interested in providing financial support for the CCDH's reparation and development efforts. Separately, Ministry of Interior (MOI) contacts confirmed to poloffs that CCDH has an official mandate on election observers, which MOI will facilitate. End Summary.

WANTED: MONITORS WITH "GOOD REPUTATIONS"

2. (C) Ahmed Herzenni, the new head of the Royal Consultative Council on Human Rights (CCDH) received Ambassador Riley at his offices on July 2nd. All agree that Herzenni has big shoes to fill as he replaces Driss Benzekri, the founding President of the CCDH, who died of cancer in May 2007(reftel). Halima Embarek Warzazi, a member of the Council and former Moroccan Ambassador to the U.N., and Abderrazak Rouwane, Chief of the CCDH Victims Protection and Support Department accompanied Herzenni to the meeting. Herzeni confirmed reports that the CCDH was asked by the King to manage international observation of the elections. He told the Ambassador that he wants to invite respected international personalities, such as former heads of state with "good geographic reputations and moral authority," to serve as part of a monitoring delegation.

3. (C) Herzenni said that the CCDH does not have a complete vision yet for its management of the election observation process. He hopes to have selection criteria for domestic and international observers, and a list of potential invitees, by July 13th. Although he welcomed technical support, training, and information from NGOs, he did not want to throw the door open to a broad range of international organizations to serve as monitors, as it would be difficult to control operationally.

4. (C) Herzenni welcomed the Ambassador's indication of potential USG financial and technical support for CCDH's observation efforts, but asked whether such support required the inclusion of U.S. monitors, or participation by U.S. organizations. Herzenni added that Moroccan law does not yet allow the presence of non-voters or observers unaffiliated with political parties at voting sites. The King must still issue a decree to allow such activities. Herzenni reiterated GOM's desire that the September elections be free and fair saying that it is the "will of the King and his desire." The Ambassador stated that organizations with technical expertise such as

NDI and IRI were already working in Morocco and could help election observation efforts.

CCDH LOOKING TO PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

15. (C) Herzenni said that in addition to current issues, the CCDH continues the mandate of its precursor, the Equity and Reconciliation Commission (IER) in resolving the consequences of the former repression in the Hassan II era in three key areas:

A) (C) Reparations to Individual Victims of the "Years of Lead": 92 percent of the reparation cases are completed and CCDH expects to finalize the remainder by the end of July. As part of this process, the CCDH will sign an accord on the 5th of July with the GOM allowing individuals with adjudicated cases access to free medical care throughout the country for life.

B) (C) Collective Reparations to Communities and Regions: Communities and regions that suffered from government oppression are being targeted for special development funds and projects. These projects have specific funds allocated to them by the GOM. Potential projects include building an education center or clinic on the site of a former prison, business development, and micro-enterprise training for affected regions. Herzenni said that the European Union contributed significantly to this aspect of the CCDH's work and wondered if the USG could offer financial or material support. The Ambassador stated that although most USG assistance does not go towards building, there were possibilities through existing programs.

D) (C) Resolving Cases of the Missing: Of the 300 missing persons cases submitted to the IER and transferred to the CCDH, Herzenni stated that 260 have been resolved through identification of bodies or conclusive testimony. To resolve a case, CCDH investigators take

witness and participants' testimony and then try to find the missing person's grave. A few individuals are reported to actually be alive in other countries, but the CCDH has no conclusive evidence to prove this; although they investigate all such leads. The 40 remaining cases await resolution. The CCDH bought advanced DNA analysis equipment for the Moroccan Gendarmerie and is paying for personnel to be trained in France. When the technicians return from training, CCDH will submit the final DNA cases for identification. Herzenni said that some cases will unfortunately remain unresolved. The file of the legendary activist Mehdi Ben Barka who disappeared in the 1950's remains of particular interest. He said that the CCDH is reviewing the recently declassified CIA "Family Jewels" documents in hopes of finding references to the case, and asked if the USG had any other information.

CONDITION OF CURRENT PRISONERS AND GENERAL HUMAN RIGHTS CONCERNS:

16. (C) CCDH personnel visit prisoners and receive complaints of mistreatment from the public. They refer such cases to the appropriate ministries and monitor their resolution. CCDH also serves as a central point of contact for receipt of human rights complaints from the general public.

WORKING TOWARD A CULTURE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

17. (C) As part of the CCDH's mission to institutionalize a national "culture of human rights" and ensure that the GOM does not repeat past excesses, Herzenni and CCDH staff hold direct consultations with the Moroccan diaspora. They ask Moroccan expatriates for their ideas on the country's evolution, and their vision for its future. They held four meetings in Morocco on this subject and visited Moroccan communities in 30 countries; including the United States a little over a month ago.

18. (C) Looking to the future, CCDH is working to implement the IER's recommended reforms to promote judicial independence and human-rights-based constitutional reform to prevent a return to governmental impunity. CCDH members, and Herzenni in particular, travel throughout the Arab world and other countries to relate the Moroccan perspective on the truth and reconciliation process.

Herzenni said that, although Morocco should be justifiably proud of its recent record with the IER and CCDH, it must be respectful of other nations' unique contexts when discussing transitional justice.

He was careful not to criticize Algeria saying that, "their actions are relevant to their situation." He welcomed advice, suggestions and support, provided they were given with respect.

"Morocco is an old country, but young in the search for democracy and looks forward to working in close partnership with the Embassy, USG, and other countries and organizations."

AMBASSADOR EXPRESSES CONDOLENCES AND CONTINUED SUPPORT

19. (C) The Ambassador also expressed his personal condolences on the loss of former CCDH President Benzekri. He underscored USG support for human rights in Morocco and for CCDH's efforts. Through the annual human rights report and regular interaction and dialogue with GOM on human rights issues, Embassy Rabat will continue to support the development of a human rights culture in Morocco.

BIO NOTE

10. (C) Ahmed Herzenni is the new President of the Consultative Council for Human Rights (CCDH) nominated by the King on May 31, 2007 to replace the late President Driss Benzekri. He was Deputy Secretary General of the CCDH's precursor, the Equity and

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Reconciliation Committee (IER), also previously presided over by Benzekri. Imprisoned for 12 years during the "Years of Lead" for his Marxist ideology, Herzenni was the first to testify during the opening of the IER hearings. After release, he received a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of Kentucky in 1994, specializing in questions of rural and urban Sociology as well as education and professional training. He consulted on several projects pertaining to these issues for USAID, the World Bank, and the Moroccan Ministry of Agriculture.

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